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Paradise: In a Dream

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ABSTRACT

Paradise: In a Dream is a poem by Christina Rossetti, which is based on a dream the author had of heaven. It was my goal to give this masterpiece a musical dimension: expanding its meaning and giving the experience dramatic implications. The harmonic language and tensions come from the words of the poem. I used progressive tonality to tie the twentieth-century musical element to the romantic idiom of the poem. There are two important musical themes. The “song of Paradise” theme is Schubertian and dance-like, appearing for the first time before the second verse. The theme of earthly longing is forceful and entirely step-wise, affirming the feeling of restriction. A liberty I took to give an increased feeling of expansion is after the fifth verse, when the poet states: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear hath heard, nor heart conceived.” I added a verse sung with no words to suggest a freedom from earthly restriction. By making a modulation up a tri-tone, a sense of reaching a spiritual level is achieved. At the end of this section, we modulate back, and hear themes from before to the words: “I hope to see these things again...” One of my artistic goals was to have a transformation over the entire work, and not just a musical transformation. I think this piece is entirely successful in making listeners think they have spiritually and physically gone somewhere. Finally, the song of Paradise and the theme of earthly longing make a connection at the end of the piece, showing that the two will always exist side-by-side.